



UNIVERSITY OF
TORONTO

TISHA B'AV IN THE WORKPLACE

Inclusive Employer Guide

EQUITY · DIVERSITY · INCLUSION

WHAT IS TISHA B'AV?

Tisha B'Av is the ninth day of the month of Av (which coincides with July and/or August) and is the major day of communal mourning in the Jewish calendar. Many disasters are said to have befallen the Jewish people on or around this day, such as their expulsion from England in 1290 or from Spain in 1492, but Tisha B'Av primarily commemorates the destruction of the First and Second Temples in Jerusalem in 586 B.C.E. and 70 C.E., respectively. With the destruction of the Second Temple, the Jews were exiled from Jerusalem and dispersed across the world.

This year, Tisha B'Av begins on the evening of August 12, and ends on the evening of August 13.

HOW IS IT OBSERVED?

The period leading up to Tisha B'Av, called Bayn Ha-Metsarim - "in the Straits" by some, is considered a period of mourning, and begins with a minor fast day on the Hebrew date of the 17th of Tammuz, exactly three weeks prior. Generally, joyous celebrations such as weddings do not occur at this time or on Tisha B'Av itself.

Nine days prior to Tisha B'Av, a new period of more intense mourning begins. More traditional practises include not eating meat, cutting hair or washing clothes unless they are to be worn again during the nine days. These actions are considered signs of joy or luxury, and inappropriate during the time of mourning. These practises are normatively observed in Orthodox communities, while Reform, Reconstructionist, and Conservative Jews adopt a varied range of these practices.

On Erev Tisha B'Av (the evening before the 9th of Av), it is customary to chant the verses of the Biblical Book of Lamentations in a sad tone during the evening synagogue service.

On Tisha B'Av, many Jews observe a full fast day, refraining from eating and drinking for 25 hours. The fast begins at sundown on Erev Tisha B'Av and concludes one hour after sundown on Tisha B'Av. Exemptions are made for those who need to take medication, or whose physical or mental health may be jeopardized by fasting.

As it is meant to be a joyful act, study of the Torah is also prohibited except for some sections that discuss the destruction of Jerusalem. In synagogues, lights are dimmed and the ornamental Torah covering - the parochet - is removed from the ark as a sign of mourning before the evening service. Many will not wear leather or leather-soled shoes (also a sign of luxury), typically do not greet each other and may be encouraged to sit on the floor.

The meal ending the fast traditionally omits meat and wine, in acknowledgment that the burning of the Temple continued until the next day. The time following Tisha B'Av is a period of seven weeks of consolation and comfort leading up to Rosh Hashanah, the Jewish New Year.

HOW CAN WE CREATE AN INCLUSIVE ENVIRONMENT?

1 **Get educated.** Ensure staff who supervise or work alongside Jewish colleagues are aware of Tisha B'Av and how they can be supportive.

2 **Intentional planning and accommodations.** Update your scheduling tools to reflect religious observance dates and to support the planning activities. Avoid booking meetings and scheduling events during Tisha B'Av if possible.

The University of Toronto recognizes its obligation to prevent discriminatory impacts on members of its community that arise from the failure to accommodate based on religion or creed. It is the responsibility of both the Manager and the individual seeking accommodation to work cooperatively and respectfully to explore and implement appropriate accommodation options. Accommodate requests for time off for religious observances. If shift work is the norm, staff may want to switch shifts to observe Tisha B'Av. Look for solutions that suit all parties.

3 **Don't make assumptions.** For personal reasons, not all Jewish colleagues may take time off for Tisha B'Av, but they may still observe in various ways.